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# Pilot Captured by the Japanese, 1942

Sharon Olds

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## Pilot Captured by the Japanese, 1942 · *Sharon Olds*

They are holding his arms, bringing him off the plane,  
leading him away. The black blindfold  
covers his eyes. Their white gloves  
hook around the leather of his flying-jacket,  
lapels turned back, sheepskin lining  
exposed like an inner layer of the body.  
His arms dangle. His mouth is open  
in a half-smile, still hoping to be liked.  
The guards look down, lips curled.  
They are touching something they would rather not touch.  
They are ashamed to be seen with a man who has surrendered,  
a man who has let himself be taken alive.  
He towers between them, smiling as if  
telling a joke. They lead him on his long  
American legs to his forty months  
alone in a tiger cage. He preferred  
life to honor: now let him taste it  
slowly, by itself, this thing he sets  
above all else, this life.